

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-17

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-02 INR-10

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-15 USIA-12

AID-20 RSR-01 /116 W

----- 075417

R 272215 Z JUN 73

FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8201

INFO USCINCSO

AMEMBASSY CARACAS

S E C R E T BOGOTA 5348

NOFORN

E. O. 11652: XGDS1

TAGS: PBOR, PFOR, CO, VE

SUBJECT: COLOMBIAN- VENEZUELAN OFFSHORE BOUNDARY

DISPUTE: COLOMBIA DECIDES TO INVOKE 1939 TREATY

USCINCSO FOR POLAD

REFERENCE: BOGOTA 5266

1. SOURCES IN THE FOREIGN OFFICE TOLD THE POLITICAL COUNSELOR THAT ON JUNE 26 THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MET WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTER AND OTHER OFFICIALS OF THE MINISTRY TO DISCUSS COLOMBIA'S RESPONSE TO VENEZUELA'S LATEST NOTE SUGGESTING A CONTINUATION OF DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS IN THE OFFSHORE BOUNDARY DISPUTE BETWEEN THE TWO NATIONS. THE COMMITTEE AGREED IN PRINCIPLE THAT COLOMBIA CAN NO LONGER DELAY INVOKING THE DECEMBER 17, 1939 TREATY BETWEEN VENEZUELA AND COLOMBIA ON NON- AGGRESSION, CONCILIATION, ARBITRATION AND JUDICIAL SETTLEMENT. UNLESS OVERRULED BY THE PRESIDENT, THE FOREIGN MINISTER WILL SEND A NOTE TO THE VENEZUELAN IN WHICH HE WILL REJECT A CONTINUATION

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OF DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS AND WILL INVOKE THE 1939 TREATY.

2. EVEN IF THE 1939 TREATY IS INVOKED, THERE WILL BE NO IMMEDIATE PRESSURE ON VENEZUELA TO TAKE THE ISSUE TO ARBITRATION OR WORLD COURT. THE MECHANISMS IN THE TREATY ARE QUITE COMPLEX AND LENGTHY. THE TREATY CALLS FOR A PERMANENT CONCILIATION COMMISSION OF FIVE MEMBERS EACH PARTY CHOOSES TWO MEMBERS, ONLY ONE OF WHOM MAY BE A NATIONAL OF THE STATE BY WHOM CHOSEN. THE FIFTH MEMBER, THE PRESIDENT, IS CHOSEN BY THE FIRST FOUR AND MAY NOT BE A NATIONAL OF EITHER STATE. THE COMMISSION HAS ONE YEAR IN WHICH TO SUBMIT A PROPOSAL, AFTER WHICH THE PARTIES SHALL HAVE SIX MONTHS TO NEGOTIATE A SETTLEMENT ON THE BASIS OF THE COMMISSION'S PROPOSED SOLUTION. (THE ONE- YEAR PERIOD MAY BE EXTENDED BY AGREEMENT.) IF NO AGREEMENT IS REACHED AT THE END OF SIX MONTHS, THE DISPUTE IS TO BE SUBMITTED TO JUDICIAL OR ARBITRAL DECISION.

3. UNDER THE TREATY EITHER PARTY MAY INVOKE A CLAUSE THAT SAYS QUESTIONS OF " VITAL INTEREST, INDEPENDENCE AND TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY" DO NOT FALL WITHIN THE SCOPE OF THE TREATY. IF VENEZUELA SHOULD INVOKE THE CLAUSE, COLOMBIA WILL ARGUE THAT ANOTHER ARTICLE IN THE TREATY (ARTICLE 24) STIPULATES THAT DIFFERENCES OF INTERPRETATION OR EXECUTION OF THE TREATY SHALL BE SUBMITTED TO THE WORLD COURT OR ARBITRAL TRIBUNAL BY MEANS OF SIMPLE APPLICATION OF OTHER PARTY. COLOMBIA WILL ALSO ARGUE THAT ARTICLE 15 SAYS THAT " ANY QUESTION OF INTERNATIONAL LAW" NOT SETTLED BY CONCILIATION SHALL BE SUBMITTED TO JUDICIAL DECISION BY THE WORLD COURT OR AN ARBITRAL TRIBUNAL.

4. THE TECHNICIANS AND CAREER PEOPLE IN THE COLOMBIAN GOVERNMENT HAVE LONG FELT THAT INVOCATION OF THE 1939 TREATY IS THE ONLY ACCEPTABLE ROUTE: THE POLITICAL LEVELS HESITATED TO INVOKE THE TREATY BECAUSE THEY FELT THAT BY DOING SO THEY WOULD OFFEND VENEZUELA. THE TECHNICIANS SAY NONSENSE, THAT VENEZUELA HAS DONE A SLICK JOB OF TELEGRAPHING TO THE COLOMBIANS THEY WOULD BE OFFENDED IN ORDER TO FORESTALL COLOMBIA'S EXERCISING
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HER RIGHTS. NOW, THE MEMBERS OF THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS ADVISORY COMMITTEE HAVE AGREED THAT THE ISSUE CAN NO LONGER BE POSTPONED. THEY ADDUCE TWO BASIC REASONS FOR INVOKING THE TREATY AT THIS TIME: 1) COLOMBIA WOULD BE DOING A DISSERVICE TO ITSELF AND TO VENEZUELA IF FOREIGN MINISTER VAZQUEZ AND PRESIDENT PASTRANA VISITED VENEZUELA WITHOUT FIRST MAKING CLEAR

COLOMBIA'S POSITION. IF THEY WENT THERE BEFORE
REPLYING TO THE VENEZUELAN PROPOSAL IT WOULD BE EVEN
MORE DIFFICULT AFTER THE WINING AND DINING AND
EXPRESSIONS OF FRIENDSHIP TO INVOKE THE TREATY. 2)
COLOMBIA'S PERCEPTION OF THE " ARMS RACE" IS THAT
VENEZUELA IS STEADILY INCREASING ITS INVENTORY OF
ARMAMENTS AND MANY COLOMBIANS ARE ASKING THEMSELVES
AND THEIR GOVERNMENT WHY IT IS THAT COLOMBIA
SITS BACK AND DOES NOTHING TO PROTECT ITS RIGHTS.
OFFICIALS IN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY ARE CONVINCED THAT THE
GOVERNMENT MUST EXERCISE COLOMBIA'S RIGHTS OR SUFFER
SERIOUS PUBLIC RELATIONS REVERSES AND POSSIBLE LOSS
OF ABILITY TO EXERCISE LEADERSHIP OVER THE COLOMBIAN
MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT.

5. INTERNAL VENEZUELAN POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS ALSO
ENTER INTO COLOMBIA'S CALCULATIONS.
AS THE COLOMBIANS SEE IT, VENEZUELA OBTAINED A VERY
FAVORABLE TREATY FROM GREAT BRITAIN WITH RESPECT TO
GUYANA IN 1966. THE TREATY CALLED FOR A FOUR- YEAR
PERIOD OF NEGOTIATIONS TO DEFINE THE PERMANENT BOUNDARY
AND IF AFTER FOUR YEARS THE TWO PARTIES COULD NOT
AGREE THE ISSUE WAS TO BE TAKEN TO THE WORLD COURT.
IN 1970, THE COPIE PARTY WAS IN POWER AND NEGOTIATING
WITH THE COLOMBIANS ON THE OFFSHORE BOUNDARY DISPUTE.
IN ORDER NOT TO GIVE THE COLOMBIANS A PRECEDENT, THE
VENEZUELANS SIGNED AN AGREEMENT WITH THE GUYANESE POSTPONING
THE SETTLEMENT OF THEIR PORBLEM FOR TWELVE YEARS.
COLOMBIANS CLAIM THIS ACTION CAUSED A TREMENDOUS UPROAR
IN THE VENEZUELAN CONGRESS WHERE MEMBERS
OF ACCION DEMOCRATICA INSISTED THAT THE GUYANESE
QUESTION, WHICH THEY HAD NEGOTIATED WHEN THEY WERE IN
POWER, BE SETTLED. THE COLOMBIANS BELIEVE THAT IF ACCION
DEMOCRATICARETURNS TO POWER IT WILL MOVE TO RESOLVE THE
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GUYANESE QUESTION AND THAT THAT WILL HELP COLOMBIA'S CASE,
ESPECIALLY IF SHE HAS PREVIOUSLY INVOKED THE 1939 TREATY.
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*** Current Handling Restrictions *** n/a
*** Current Classification *** SECRET

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts:
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 27 JUN 1973
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: golinofr
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1973BOGOTA05348
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: XGDS-1
Errors: n/a
Film Number: n/a
From: BOGOTA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1973/newtext/t19730628/aaaajnsq.tel
Line Count: 163
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: NOFORN
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: NOFORN
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: golinofr
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 18 JAN 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <18-Jan-2002 by collinp0>; APPROVED <08 FEB 2002 by golinofr>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: <DBA CORRECTED> jms 980225
Subject: COLOMBIAN- VENEZUELAN OFFSHORE BOUNDARY DISPUTE: COLOMBIA DECIDES TO INVOKE 1939 TREATY
TAGS: PBOR, CO, VE
To: ARA
CARACAS
SECSTATE WASHDC
USCINCSO
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005